Bitumen networks and river paths

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Abstract

The premise of my investigation is that a perceptual break takes place between driving along the highway, experiencing the landscape at high speed and then stopping to experience the highway outside the enclosure and protection of the vehicle.

Landscape exists in a state of flux defined and augmented by changing relationships between nature, technology and perceptions of place in the universe. I think in terms of landscape imagery – particularly the picturesque – when I view natural environments. The roadside environment was selected as the site for this investigation because of its metaphorical capacity to represent a perceptual break in experiencing the environment. As a space it is littered with animal carcasses and roadside detritus, which when passed at close range during highway travel is easily overlooked. In this project I interrupt drives to look at what animal has fallen victim to traffic. In doing so I experience different perspectives on car travel and the roadside environment as well as temporarily providing a remedy for the apathy that the modern car interior induces.

In recognising, dissecting and exploring the various tropes of landscape painting, I have attempted to interrogate the way cultural conventions shape our capacity to see and imagine the environment. By choosing the roadside as the place for this break, I provide a catalyst for revitalising the way that I see and think about the natural world and introduce my own comment on the language of landscape.

The idea of a break in perception is explored in three parts in the exegesis which establishes a narrative from which the central ideas can be explored. These are: the specific links between car travel and picturesque landscape imagery; the break in perception and the many objects discovered on the roadside through reference to Vanitas

(a reminder of the transience of life and the certainty of death encouraging a somber world view) and the allegorical possibilities that the roadside elements might hold for a personal visual language; and the alienating character of many roadside spaces lending itself to Surreal readings and illusionism.

The work consists of a tripartite exploration using drawing, pinhole photography and the integration of these media to inform the paintings that represent the visual outcome of the investigation.

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INTRODUCTION

Landscape is commonly understood to occupy that ground where nature and culture collide. As a term, it exists in a certain state of flux defined and augmented by changing relationships between nature, technology and perceptions of place in the universe. For me landscape has come to represent a place of sanctuary away from the hustle and bustle of cities and towns. My comfort with this outlook has led to complacency about how I view natural environments. I think in terms of landscape imagery and in my practice the challenge is to find my way beyond the landscape conventions which limit the ways I see the world and the images I make. I have decided to respond to this challenge by subjecting myself to a sudden change in the experiencing of an environment. I call this a break in perception. By choosing the roadside as the place for this break, I provide a catalyst for revitalising the way that I see and think about the natural world and introduce my own comment on the language of landscape.

Whilst driving through country areas I often see landscapes that echo picturesque compositions. For example, trees may neatly frame a pleasant vista that I can admire as I drive by. At the same time the roadside environment, containing dead animals and passed at close range is easily overlooked. In this project I interrupt drives to look at what animal has fallen victim to traffic. In doing so I experience different perspectives on car travel and the roadside environment as well as temporarily providing a remedy for the apathy that the modern car interior induces.

There is an enormous tension between these two contrasting realities which co-exist in the environment occupied by the road and its immediate surroundings. This tension is barely noticed inside the insulated environment of the modern vehicle, but once one stops on the side of the highway and steps out of the protective casing, one encounters a strikingly different reality. A world where trucks hurtle past sending out shock waves and all traffic takes on frightening new proportions. In this world occupied by the animal, vehicles of all kinds cut swathes of destruction through the countryside as they carry their transient human occupants. The premise of my investigation is that a perceptual break takes place between driving along the highway at high speed and

then stopping to experience the highway outside the enclosure and protection of the vehicle.

The idea of a break in perception is explored in three parts. Constructing my thesis around these will allow me to establish a narrative from which central ideas can be explored. The three parts consist of drawing, the use of pinhole photography and finally integrating these to inform the paintings. This dissection of my working process is considered in Chapter 1 - Artistic Process.

The second chapter Windscreen Landscapes- The Picturesque and Highway Travel, considers the broader context of landscape and explores specific links between car travel and picturesque landscape imagery; an issue that rests at the core of the visual exploration. The third chapter Emergence from the Mobile Domestic Cocoon details the break in perception and the many objects discovered on the roadside. This leads into a brief investigation of the genre of still life painting known as the Vanitas (a reminder of the transience of life and the certainty of death encouraging a somber world view) and the allegorical possibilities that the roadside elements might hold for a personal visual language. It addresses the break in perception and the first experiences of the highway, post moving car occupancy, where the contrast between speeding traffic and the stillness of the roadside are explored through the genre of still life. The final chapter 'Landscape Illusions, Illusions of Landscape' looks at how the alienating character of many roadside spaces lends itself to Surreal readings and illusionism.

Chapter 1

Process

In contextualising my practise this paper examines some of the key issues relating to my perception of the landscape and issues associated to representing these ideas in contemporary painting practice. Process remains central to my investigation of the break in perception. The roadside environment has become a site for experience, contemplation and experimentation. Descriptions of the evolution of process can be best described in three parts; drawing, pinhole photography and painting.

Drawing

The act of drawing the highway and the wider environment from the perspective of my parked car made me acutely aware of the huge number of landscape scenes that can be viewed whilst travelling the roads and highways of Tasmania. Landscape unfolds from the insular shell of the car interior, panoramas are framed by the internal geometry of the vehicle's windows, tree tops give way to jagged corridors which in turn frame distant sunlit hills like tiny paintings. The more I travel on highways and roads the more picturesque the landscape appears. This aspect of car travel, through the country, generally becomes part of the comforting and numbing car interior, like animated wallpaper. Limitations with drawing from within the isolating car space with its interrupting window frames compelled me to get out of the car to explore the roadside environment which subsequently became the site of the visual exploration.

Exiting the vehicle interior I was faced with the immediate feeling of vulnerability as traffic sped past. My focal range expanded dramatically as I saw a dimension of the travel way containing animal remains, decay and general wear and tear. These provided subject matter for drawings. I developed a habit of drawing and reflecting on the confronting nature of this previously fleeting world. The action of getting out of the car on the side of the highway added a new dynamic to my working process.

This shift ruptured my perception of the landscape creating a tension between the insular car environment and the wider highway environment. I began to see highway travel in different ways. Organic debris and roadside detritus littered the edge of the travel corridor. This intersection of human made and natural subject matter existing

within the roadside made it a place rich in allegorical potential such as found in Antonio De Pedera's vanitas painting of three skulls and a gold-and-silver watch (the painting will be discussed in chapter three). My immediate impulse was to focus on what I saw as the most potent of roadside subject matter, the dead animal. I started recording in detailed pencil drawings dead birds that I had taken from the roadside (see Fig.1).

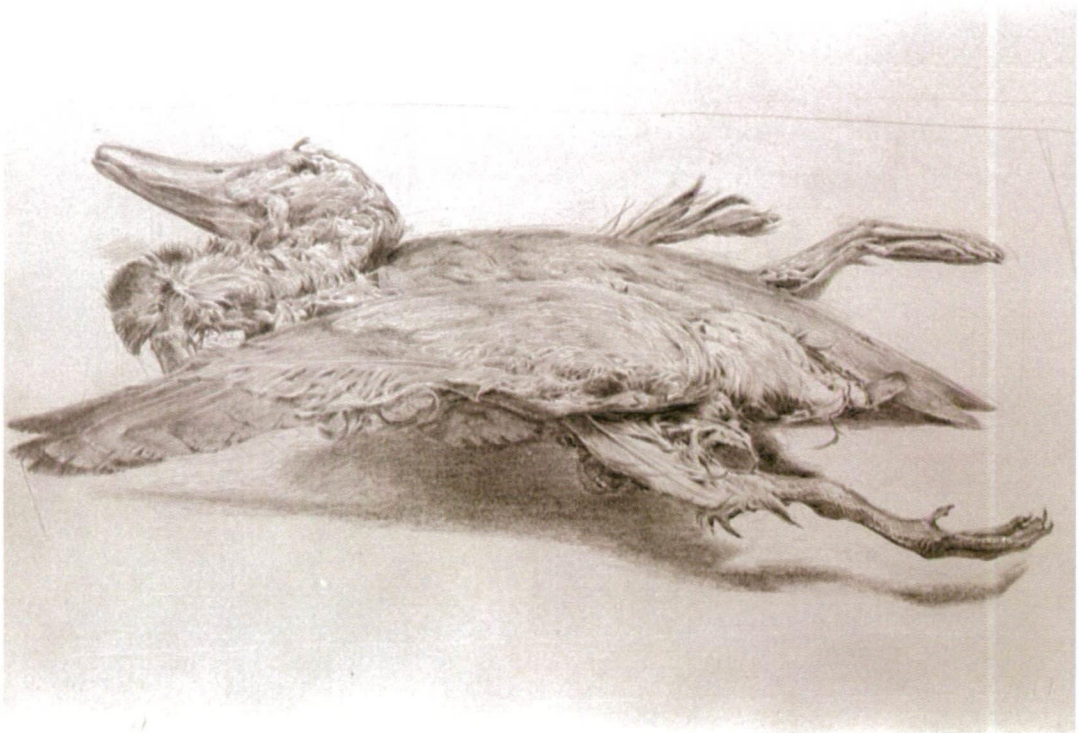

Fig.1 Damien Baumgartner, *Dead native duck found by the roadside,* pencil, 2005

Drawing is often the first way I explore new subject matter. It allows a close examination of form and an intimate engagement with subject matter. As I draw a dead animal and contemplate the myriad of shapes within the carcass (whilst trying to maintain concentration amongst highway noise and movement), questions arise about the way the road occupies the landscape. How are animal habitats affected by the way a road divides the land? In what ways might some animals have adapted to the road and even exploited it? The range of questions evoked by the desolate and hostile roadside environment resulted in it emerging as the site for this visual exploration.

While detailed drawings provided insight into the roadside environment it became apparent that many parts of the roadside remained difficult, or impossible, to record in the little time and the awkward space provided. A camera would have been advantageous in such situations but there was something about the instantaneous nature of the camera that concerned me. I subsequently chose to use a pinhole camera because for me it represented a medium that stood somewhere between conventional photography and sketching, in terms of time spent recording. This is important for two main reasons – firstly because longer times spent on the road and roadside recording allowed me to step out of the prevailing zeitgeist of speed and efficiency to spend some time experiencing and absorbing the intense qualities of the roadside environment. Secondly was my need to reflect on the sombre reality of the fallen animal.

Pinhole

The pinhole camera allowed for extended exposure times as light pierced through the small opening of the device in contrast to conventional photography where the lens could be seen as a filter. Releasing the shutter and waiting from anywhere between 2 seconds and 10 minutes, evoked some of the qualities of making a drawing. Another quality peculiar to the pinhole device is the infinite depth of field. This allows the bringing together of near and far objects in a fusion of micro and macroscopic images blending and fusing the roadside objects with trees and road-signs (see Fig. 2).

Fig.2 Damien Baumgartner, *Dead wallaby on the roadside*, pinhole photograph, *2005*

This second capability became important because it helped produce an immersive quality when the camera was placed on or near the ground. This is a common practise with pinhole users as the technique requires stable stationary positions free of camera shake. Having to adopt low to ground level perspectives made me think differently, in that it placed the eyes' view at the level of the animal. Producing photos at this low view-point took me out of my usual viewing patterns making me think about animal's perspectives and the way in which many species might see the road. The highway surface loomed to meet the sky as a new horizon punctured by road signs and trees. Ironically a barren, almost alien landscape could be achieved in a place that stands as the modern archetype for a widely used, convenient and multi lane thoroughfare.

These imaginings of animal road perspectives and a new-found sense of the paradoxical within the highway and roadside space made my thoughts gravitate towards the surreal. This intensified early impressions generated by the feeling of dislocation experienced.

The results from my first black and white pinhole experiments taken from a low perspective generated an unexpected compression of planes. The infinite depth of

field brought near and far objects into strange juxtapositions, for example a distant tree seeming to emerge from the back of a dead animal.

After much experimentation the use of the pinhole camera was expanded and redesigned so that colour pinhole images could be made (see Fig.3). Attracted to the saturated hues produced by colour photo processing, and the way they combined with the pinhole aesthetic, I recorded many ground-level, colour images of the road.

Fig.3 Damien Baumgartner, *Dead wallaby found on the road,* pinhole photograph, 2005

Making pinhole photos in the roadside environment evoked a range of emotions including empathy for creatures regularly facing the road's perils. Awkwardness and vulnerability was intensified by the horror of seeing dead animals. Conversely, moments of odd clarity came to me. When photographing a carcass I noticed that the fly's presence not only heralds the first signs of decay but it evoked a strange and surreal elegance as it came to represent for me nature's regenerative power. This runs against its general reputation as a repulsive insect. In this sense it is a creature that makes itself at home in the realm of the Surreal. This and the roadside's many other

surreal qualities have become increasingly apparent with each experience of the break in perception. These moments of lucidity allowed me to think of the road as being akin to a river.

It is an analogy that has evolved through the project. Visiting and revisiting many roadside sites has allowed insight into my highway travel experiences such that I felt the vehicle's momentum like the currents of a fast flowing river. To stop on the roadside meant searching for a safe place to pull over as well as giving up the comforts of the vehicle interior. It is much easier to continue on cruising than it is to make a sometimes quite risky stop on the side of the road. The structure of the road is such that efficiency, safety and flow are maintained. The river analogy expresses an inevitability that I see in the road's nature.

Painting

After visiting and re-visiting many sites along the roadside and collecting drawings and pinhole records of roadside detritus and animal carcasses I returned to the studio. I decided to use these images as studies for paintings as this process allowed me to meditate upon my experiences of the roadside environment. As with drawing, painting allowed a close examination of all the unexpected shapes and details, an investigation that is only really possible through the processes of painting and drawing. Besides, the presentation of pinholes as artworks, in this case, did not appeal to me as I saw photography as synonymous with the car in its ability to symbolise speed, efficiency and the instantaneous. These were qualities I wanted to avoid in highlighting the different nature of the outer car, roadside reality.

This reservation echoes John Ruskin's suspicion of photography, which he saw as replacing close observation for its users. His enthusiasm for the medium 'diminished as he observed the devilish problem that photography created for the majority of its practitioners. Rather than using photography as a supplement to active, conscious seeing, they used it as an alternative, paying less attention to the world than they had previously from a faith that photography automatically assured them possession of it.'(De Botton, 2003, 225)

The soft almost painterly aesthetic of the colour pinhole and its infinite depth of field combined with the ground level viewpoint and the influence of Surrealist painting to present new possibilities. Quite often these images collapse planes resulting in a merging of near and far objects and textures in ambiguous confluences. The low viewpoint exaggerated the scale of close roadside objects helping create a Surreal vision.

These roadside elements constituted an ambiguous border space; a space in which the ground-level, pinhole views of these edges seemed to merge. My imagination superimposed the microscopic on the macroscopic. The road's edge transformed into a riverbank or coastal area. I began imagining landscapes in my roadside pinholes and projecting roadside settings on to the landscape paintings and photos of other artists.

I consciously began to use the cavities and structure of pictorial landscape tradition realising that resemblances to landscape compositions have the potential to disguise roadside scenes. By merging the picturesque landscape configurations seen from inside the car with what is found on the roadside, a dynamic viewing experience can be set up via the viewer's approach to the work. An appearance of landscape is given from a distance and as the viewer approaches to inspect the detail, their expectations collide with the subject matter of the roadside.

A confluence of roadside and landscape elements allowed trees to merge with flies, fur with grass and wings with mountains creating a set of triggers for the mental collision of the approaching viewer. The method presented several problems. Firstly, such an artwork that involves inducing a specific mental response in all viewers must be made, keeping in mind, the challenge of anticipating any subjective reading that might cancel out that response. Secondly, difficulty will sometimes exist in contextualizing the image within the roadside environment. Finally there is the problem that once the viewers have seen one such artwork they will easily be able to predict any such artwork seen shortly after.

In response to the first problem I have put a number of triggers in different parts of each painting (eg different shape and textural analogies) thus allowing for the viewers' scanning of the image as well as their approach. This also provides for

different rates of recognition by different viewers creating a range for the mental collision to take place. The second problem of contextualization within the roadside environment has been addressed through several experiments. One idea has been to make a series of paintings in which clues reveal the roadside setting, thus setting up a narrative between several works. The final problem of the viewer carrying an awareness of the collision around the exhibition and making all subsequent collision paintings predictable can be resolved in more than one way. The illusions used are devices that have a symbolic capacity in themselves. A symbolic significance could be seen to lie in the roadside's carnage and detritus reflecting a serene landscape. These collision paintings also have a potential beyond display as a group where a single image can lie in wait for the unwary viewer. This is not really helpful to the job at hand, that of setting up an exhibition, but I think it is still worth bearing in mind.

In addition to answering the problem of predictability I think that by using a range of visual triggers, and by not being locked into a strict formula for the way I intend to bring about the collision, I can keep the viewer interested. I also believe that by guiding the viewer through the work in a particular way and providing a loose narrative that gradually moves beyond the collision response the work's ability to maintain viewer engagement will be further heightened.

John Glover's and Peter Dombrovskis's compositional structures have been referenced as these images readily merge with a visual roadside language. Dombrovskis's *Morning Mist, Rock Island Bend, Franklin River* (1979) and Glover's *Harvest Home (1835)* have been chosen not only because they are recognised as Tasmanian, but also because they triggered a strong imaginative reaction in me after studying the pinhole imagery (see Fig.4&5). For me they have an accidental kinship with the view of the roadside. My paintings are based closely on the compositions and colours of these works and have landscape features such as trees and sweeping hills replaced with roadside elements including feathers, thistles and flies. Merging the overall landscape compositions of the familiar with the detail of the roadside allows a strengthening of the collision effect. I am confident that this strategy will create in the viewer, when distant from the painting, a comfort of the known with niggling elements departing slightly from the original inviting closer inspection. Further

technical aspects such as heightening or lowering of the horizon, scale and the use of more texture in my paint application continue as areas of experimentation.

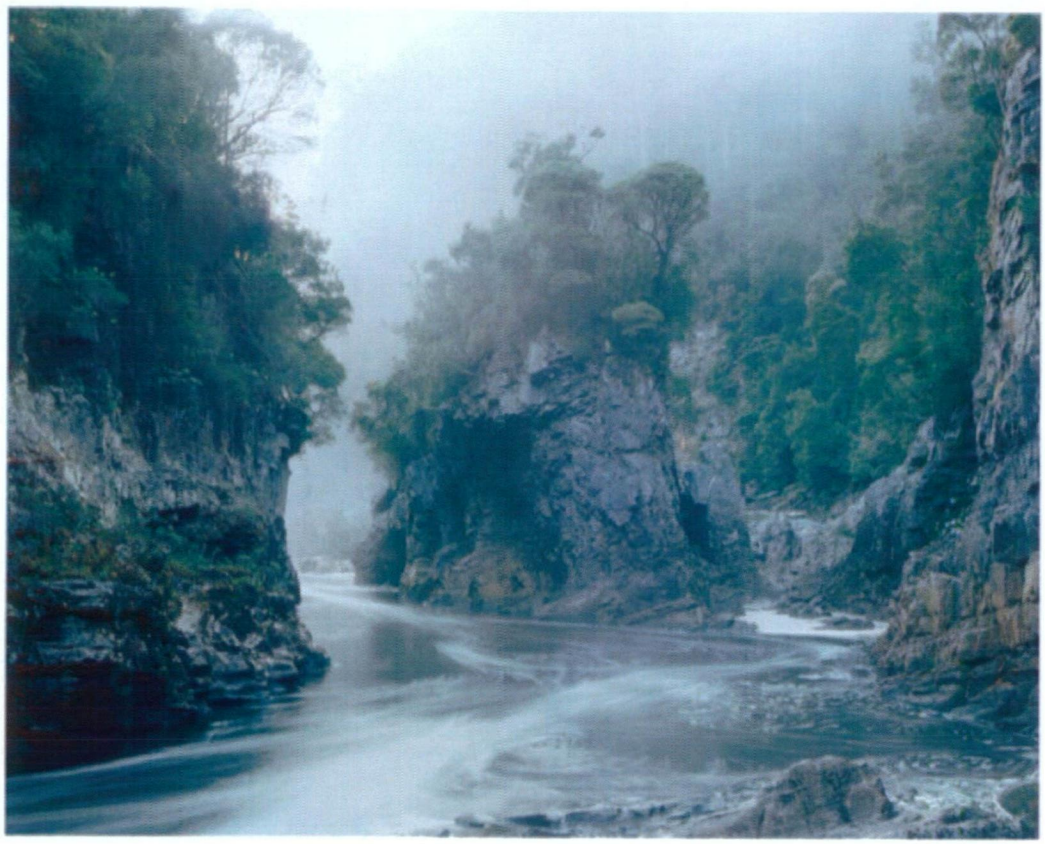

Fig.4 Peter Dombrovskis, *Morning Mist, Rock Island Bend, Franklin River, 1979,* photograph

Fig.5 John Glover, *Harvest Home, 1835,* oil on canvas

My process development to date of drawing, pinhole and painting can be used to discern important facets of the break in perception. The drawing time, the initial part of which was spent inside the car sketching, can be used to mark the pre break in perception phase looking at links between car travel and landscape imagery. Pinhole marks the shock of entering the highway after being in the moving car, where the contrast between the moving traffic and the stillness of the roadside are explored through the particular genre of still life vanitas paintings. In the final chapter dealing with painting I delve further into what it means to occupy the roadside for any length of time and how surrealism can be used to give a new perspective on the environments existing parallel to each other within our travelways.

Chapter 2

Windscreen Landscapes- The Picturesque and Highway Travel

Connections can be made between picturesque landscape painting and the outlook from a moving car on a main country road or highway. I look at how the road designer's rationale controls the highway travellers' viewing of landscape and how this ties in with ideas of the picturesque. A brief overview of the picturesque is necessary. Mitchell's idea of the landscape as medium and Jay Appleton's theory about the primal nature of framing and viewing landscape are explored, to contextualise my exploration of the break in perception and the roadside environment.

I engage with the genre of picturesque landscape in this project because I want to examine my reliance upon it for visually making sense of natural environments. By framing and arranging representations of the natural world and implementing other picturesque devices, I convince myself of the power to create an imaginary space, capable of evoking emotions in myself and others. I seek alternatives to that landscape notion best described by Jonathan Bowden when he says 'interior maelstroms that constantly explore and amplify the boundaries of the human imagination- in the world of paint and the world of nature there is always, somewhere, a place of refuge a still point... "The inscape" or landscape created from imagination is a subject familiar to all lovers of landscape from the nineteenth century onward (Bowden, 2009). In recognising, dissecting and exploring the various tropes of landscape painting, I have attempted to interrogate the way cultural conventions shape our capacity to see and imagine the world we inhabit.

The capacity of traditional landscape to position distance in a scene of overlaying landmasses provides the viewer with the impression of an outlook. Careful arrangement of depicted landscape elements allows the enjoyment of views, outlooks and vistas. This is one of the governing principles behind the picturesque. The acts of landscape viewing and depiction, refined in the theory of the picturesque, have influence in today's shaping of land for road design with the ultimate goal being more

pleasant travelling views from the vehicle. The picturesque is defined by William Gilpin as

> That kind of beauty which would look well in a picture... what is pleasing to the eye, what strikes the viewer as singular or appeals to him with the force of a painting, what is expressible in a painting, would either afford a good subject for a painted landscape, or help in conceiving one. (Hunt, 1993:337)

Development of picturesque compositions entailed creating pleasing visual paths for the eye whether they were visual ones (eg. through foliage patterns, plumes and boughs leading the eye from sky to land or visa versa) or physical ones (where one could travel on foot or conveyance) including waterways or rivers. It will be shown that road and highway design are influenced by these ideas of providing easy landscape viewing. Landscape viewing and the act of occupying the speeding vehicle on country roads and highways are linked. Addressing two key theories about landscape art will allow me to articulate these links, helping define visual outlook of the land in the speeding highway vehicle and allowing a contrast with being on the highway or roadside. With a landscape aesthetic rationale embedded in much highway design it follows that contemporary landscape theories can be discussed in relation to road/highway travel.

Landscape depictions became more frequent from the Renaissance onwards as artists began grappling with the problems of depicting land. How could a natural outdoor scene be represented convincingly? The Renaissance invention of linear perspective had limitations to this end. A. Richard Turner says

> Linear perspective, then, is a limited tool in the hands of the landscapist. It may well be, and usually is, the assumption which lies behind his treatment of space, but in practice it is only implied. More basic means must be used: overlapping tongues of land, curved guiding lines, color relationships, aerial perspective, varying intensities of light. (Turner, 1966:7)

The French artist Claude Lorrain was one of the first to make landscape paintings as large backdrops to small mythological figures (Fig.6). He used his outdoor sketches as reference for paintings made in the studio. There he composed the landscape elements of trees, streams, mountains and lakes into artificial scenes. This aspect of organization in his works makes him a precursor to the picturesque. If the picturesque could be embodied in a single instrument it would have to be the Claude glass.

Named after the painter, this small framing device consisting of 'a small portable mirror backed with dark foil', was 'recommended in the eighteenth century to both artists and tourists of "picturesque" scenery.' (Schama, 1995:11) It worked by allowing the user, via the framing and containment of a reflection, to assess the picturesque qualities of any chosen landscape.

Fig.6 Claude Lorrain, *View from Delphi with a procession*, 1650, oil on canvas

Framing and arranging weren't the only picturesque devices. In its most overt form branches, trees, hills and even mountains could be edited out or adjusted to make way for the poetically ideal. Gilpin gives insights into the mindset of an adherent to the picturesque.

> ...the imagination is apt to whisper, what glorious scenes might be here made, if these stubborn materials could yield to the judicious hand of art! By this force of creative power an intervening hill may be turned aside; and a distance produced. This ill-shaped mountain may be pared and formed into a better line.(Wilton, 1980:32)

These devices, of editing, screening, arranging and framing, were put to work by the artist of the picturesque, so that poetic and allegorical allusions could be made. These tendencies towards a mental framing and containment of nature, present within the picturesque, became a widespread way of seeing natural surrounds at their best and most ideal. Inseparability between subject and depiction developed where the overall term of landscape covered both. This brings me to the thesis of W.T.J Mitchell.

His thesis on landscape states that

> landscape is not a genre of art but a medium.
>
> Landscape is a medium of exchange between the human and the natural, the self and the other. As such, it is like money: good for nothing in itself, but expressive of a potentially limitless reserve of value.
>
> Like money, landscape is a social hieroglyph that conceals the actual basis of its value. It does so by naturalizing its conventions and conventionalising its nature.
>
> Landscape is a natural scene mediated by culture. It is both a represented and presented space, both a signifier and a signified, both a frame and what a frame contains, both a real place and its simulacrum, both a package and the commodity inside the package.
>
> Landscape is a particular historical formation associated with European imperialism.
> (W.T.J Mitchell, 1994: 5)

The term 'landscape, which has long meant either the real countryside or the pictured representation of it, is in effect the combination of the two, or the dissolving of the two together, 'a natural scene mediated by culture.' (Andrews, 1999:15) Mitchell cites this dissolution or collapsing of the two meanings into one another as a reason for the failure to question fundamental assumptions about the aesthetics of landscape. He believed that "...the appreciation of natural beauty and the painting of landscape is historically a unique phenomenon" and that landscape painting and the perception of

landscape were "invented" at some moment of history. (Mitchell, 1994: 8) Mitchell then asks the question 'Is it possible that landscape, understood as the historical "invention" of a new visual/pictorial medium, is integrally connected with imperialism?' (Mitchell, 1994: 9) He asks whether 'the rise of landscape painting in ancient Rome, China, Japan, seventeenth century France and Holland and eighteenth and nineteenth century Britain occurred at the same time as the imperialist expansion of these nations?'
(Mitchell, 1994: 9)

If one of the landscape genre's first roles in the new world was to culturally signify ownership and a juggernaut-like progression through the land, by an 'aggressively colonising settler society', what insight or chance connection can be gained by a leap to car dominated mid 20th century landscape viewings? (McCaughey, Sayers, 1998:60) Much space between these two historical parameters is taken up by the tour. Travelling through the land to appreciate the finer points of landscape viewing was a European tradition readily applied to the new realms found in Australia and North America. This tour finds a twentieth century equivalent in the 'kodakisation' of the English landscape 'through motorised touring.' (Urry,1999:5 quoting Taylor, J,1994:122) This modern proliferation of the landscape image taken from the road car is not unique to England. A brief assessment of the present visual experience of the landscape shows that the car plays an important part. Driving is an inherent part of modern life and it affects the way we see the landscape. Joseph Passonneau argues that

> We perceive the landscape from the roadway more than in any other way. And we spend more time driving through the landscape; even avid outdoorsmen spend more time driving in the landscape than they do walking in the landscape. Its hard to imagine something that has more impact on our environment and more impact on how we see the world around us. (Rieley, Passonneau, 1989:1-5)

An artwork looking at the highway travelling experience subverts this view from the vehicle in transit by pointing the gaze at the road moving underneath. In *Broken Hill Line-work* the Australian video artist Shaun Gladwell trains the camera on the road as he drives his motorcycle (Fig.7). A hypnotic effect is created as the textured road surface becomes a fluid tapestry of streaks and lines. If it weren't for the presence of

the gloved hand holding the bike handle the image would take on the appearance of animated abstraction. This work brings into sharp relief the ability of speed to disconnect or separate the vehicle occupant from his/her ever changing immediate surroundings. The moving vehicle experience replaces the sense of being grounded with a blurring vertigo. The road texture becomes fluid like a river.

Fig.7 Shaun Gladwell, Still from *Broken Hill linework, 2007*

Automobile travel seems to be inherent to a modern understanding of moving through and viewing the landscape. It embodies a freedom undreamt of before the twentieth century. Converse to the oppression resulting from the imperialist sweep of colonization through the American landscape centuries before, highways were seen as playing an "important democratizing role: the idea being that modern highways allowed more people to appreciate the wonders of nature." (Urry quotingWilson, 1992:30) It has been described how 'in the post-war period certain landscapes in the U.S.A were substantially altered so as to improve the view that they afforded from the newly constructed roads.' (Urry,1999:5) The government and then the local states turned nature into something 'to be appreciated by the eyes alone', looking out and over the scene laid out by the invincible car driver. (Urry,1999:5) (Wilson, 1992:33) These descriptions of the aesthetic shaping of American desert landscapes, with the harmonious and agreeable driver/passenger visual experience in mind, allow one to see how pervasive and immersive ideas like the picturesque landscape have become.

Road symbology and signage play a part in the perpetuation of picturesque modes of vision. For car occupants in transit, where a direct view of the scenic is not possible from the road, signage featuring a camera symbol will indicate the way towards accessing it
(Fig.8).

Fig.8 An example of the camera symbol on a sign in north west Tasmanian, 2008

In this respect the highway presents a means of accessing and consuming the landscape with the help of the camera. W.T.J. Mitchell sees in landscape a 'double role as commodity and potent cultural symbol,' it is 'the object of fetishistic practises involving the limitless repetition of identical photographs taken on identical spots by tourists with interchangeable emotions.'
He goes on to remark at landscape's seemingly inexhaustible nature as a medium.

> Dig out the gold in a mountainside, and its wealth is exhausted. But how many photographs, postcards, paintings, and awestruck "sightings" of the Grand Canyon will it take to exhaust its value as a landscape? Could we fill up the

> Grand Canyon with its representations? How do we exhaust the value of a medium like landscape? (Mitchell, 1994: 9)

This seeming inexhaustibility is no more apparent than in the vehicle driving over the Tasmanian land. As I travel over the Tasmanian land my windows frame momentary landscapes scenes streaming past in fluid succession. These visual feasts can be accompanied by the non obtrusive options of the low woosh sound of air conditioning and surround sound stereo when experienced in the modern vehicle where sensory information about the wider environment is neatly reduced to the purely visual.

> The sights, sounds, tastes, temperatures and smells of the city and countryside are reduced to the two-dimensional view through the car windscreen. The sensing of the world through the screen has of course become the dominant way of dwelling in contemporary experience. The environment beyond the windscreen is an alien other, to be kept at bay through the diverse privatising technologies incorporated within the contemporary car. (Urry,1999:9)

In this sense the car interior becomes an important dimension of the medium described by Mitchell. Not only do we have the cultural baggage of the picturesque, now we have a comfortable transitional room that, given the right environment, underscores it by offering us a multitude of landscape elements viewable from a variety of distances. On long trips I can keep looking for our personal landscape ideal, safely separated from the 'out there' by my sedating micro-environment or what Urry calls '...a simulation of the domestic environment.' (Urry,1999:9)

Urry describes how '...in each car the driver is strapped into a comfortable armchair and surrounded by micro-electronic information sources, controls and sources of pleasure. The car becomes a place of dwelling that insulates the car occupant from much of the environment they pass through.' He cites the Ford brochure of 1949 which declared that 'The 49 Ford is a living room on wheels.' (Urry,1999:9 after Marsh & Collett,1986:11)

Whilst the comfortable vehicle interior provides an ideal incubator for picturesque visions, as it cruises through the landscape, the driver has responsibility for safe navigation. Although landscape musings may not be possible the driver's responsibility does not necessarily exclude him from witnessing the picturesque vision. His is both a view more easily paralleled with a primal and pragmatic idea of the picturesque.

By connecting picturesque landscape formulas to animal behaviour and the eye of a predator (who surveys the landscape as a strategic field) Jay Appleton sees the viewer as one who inspects the landscape as 'a strategic field , a network of prospects, refuges and hazards.'(Mitchell, 1994:8) The model picturesque landscape appeals to this eye because it tends to position the viewer in a cloistered spot with 'screens on either side to dart behind or to entice curiosity and an opening to provide access at the center.' (Mitchell, 1994:8) Appleton's spectator/predator is a central idea in picturesque aesthetics with its subtext suggesting a possible threat or a primal violence lying close to the heart of landscape viewing.

> Appleton's observer is Hobbes' Natural Man, hiding in the thicket to pounce on his prey or to avoid a predator. The picturesque structure of this observer's visual field is simply a foregrounding of the scene of "natural representation" itself, "framing" or putting it on a stage. It hardly matters whether the scene is picturesque in the narrow sense; even if the features are sublime, dangerous, and so forth, the frame is always there as the guarantee that it is only a picture, only picturesque, and the observer is safe in another place – outside the frame, behind the binoculars, the camera, or the eyeball, in the dark refuge of the skull. (Mitchell, 1994:8)

The car could be added to this list of viewing containers from which the observer/driver, safely ensconced, can scan the landscape. The mobile frame of the car windscreen and the car interior combine with speed, to create an illusion of safety and shelter, a buffer from the surroundings that are being driven through. The idea of the car driver projecting the picturesque onto the passing terrain is a possibility. Indeed the aforementioned 'opening to provide deep access at the centre' as a pivotal picturesque device could easily be used to describe a navigational outlook from the moving car interior. (Mitchell, 1994:8) If I look on the road ahead can I see where I will be travelling in a minute's time? Can I speed up my trip by overtaking here? Is it safe to overtake? Will this sign tell me how far I am from my destination? Is there somewhere to eat ahead? These are all questions that could be asked by the driver or

passenger of a speeding highway vehicle, and whilst these may not be the exact thought processes of a predator, the car and highway combination places the speeding car occupant at a unique advantage, with the promise of relatively long range assessments of, and ultimate access to the safe passage part of the landscape and its corridors and vistas. The occupants of a moving car are consumers of distances and destinations.

One indispensable road symbol, by a certain degree of chance, unites landscape ideas and the driving experience in one simple form. As a symbol synonymous with the road and highway environment, the arrow with its weapon/projectile origins could also symbolize an echo of imperialism's unstoppable expansion. Its various manifestations including painted, stretched, anamorphic forms on the bitumen (for driver visibility), induce several visual associations; its triangular head could suggest a simple one point perspective schema of two lines (like sides of a straight road on a plain) receding to a point on the horizon. This chance connection of shapes evokes for me a vision of the road as a semi geometrical band carving its way through the topography to create manageable passage to countless clusters of destinations. It becomes a way of 'knowing' and 'civilizing' the land ready for human consumption, so that an illusion of order being imposed over terrain is given.

Further confirmation of the predator/hunter theory's correlations to the way one thinks about road travel, can be found in the words of a road designer. Otto Mayr, a landscape architect, holds a conception of safe roads and highways that necessitates a way of thinking about the landscape similar to the ideas of the picturesque (Rieley, Mayr,1989). The same carving up, management, manipulation and expulsion of uncertainty principles are at work. He outlines the lengths to which a diligent road designer will go, to deliver a smooth and aesthetically pleasant driving experience.

> The sum of little things makes a parkway (a wide stretch of highway) a parkway or not– a little rounding here, day-lighting there to get a vista, or screening an ugly view with landscaping. A lot can be done during construction by a landscape architect with the help of skilled engineers. (Rieley, Mayr,1989:Vol 79,1-5)

An example of aesthetic landscape manipulation, in Tasmania, is the use of tree belts to screen logged forestry coups, so that the illusion from the road is one of driving through a forest. Roads and trees have been used by landscape artists as compositional devices to focus and lead the eye into the landscape image. Where a road carves through a group of trees an instant framing device is at hand. The trees provide a frame within the picture frame helping contain the scene whilst the road helps lead the eye into the distance; a visual cliché. The history of landscape imagery, particularly the picturesque, abounds with such devices. Terry Smith observes that

> ...at landscape's conceptual core there seems to be a desire to experience being-in-the-world in some sense prior to landscape's functions as an artistic genre, a mode of tourist perception, or a way of organizing large-scale gardens or parklands. If there is a 'first' instance, it would be a particular set of processes for understanding the world outside our bodies in their most liminal sense. (Smith,1997: 30)

Landscape then becomes a conundrum, drawing us in but always remaining elusive. The more we try to free ourselves from its conventions and seek a fresh look at our relationship to our surroundings the more we become enmeshed within it.

Smith asserts that 'we always see space according to some practice of organization, some framework for sorting relationships between ourselves and others. Seeing is a social practice. Landscape is a process of configuring, as space, a perceived part of the world.' (Smith, 1997: 30) This reading of Mitchell's thesis could be extended to include the road vehicle's role within the medium and the part that it plays as a tool that envelopes and propels individuals or groups. Its separation of us from our surroundings via a shell and speed creates an environment within the wider environment.

In this chapter the picturesque is presented as an aesthetic system used to depict land and natural forms organised into pleasing arrangements for pictorial compositions. The picturesque influences the way roads are designed and dictates the way their surrounds are shaped and planned with views exploited and unpleasant parts of the landscape screened from the car commuters' sight. The insular and comfortable modern car interior, moving through rural areas, provides a multitude of opportunities

to view picturesque scenes framed by the car windows. When this landscape viewing state of high-speed comfort and insularity is subjected to the theories of W.T.J Mitchell and JayAppleton some interesting connections, parallels and comparisons can be made. Mitchell's idea of landscape as medium, which suggests an inseparability between subject and depiction, allows metaphorical possibilities for the highway travel experience. The car moving along country highway incubates a picturesque tourist mode where the fusion of the landscape as subject and the landscape as an idea, is complete.

The modern road vehicle and the road itself have together not only become fundamental to our understanding of and our engagement with land distances but they have generated a transitory environment within an environment. An environment where we are lulled into a rigid perspective, one where a complacency and apathy for nature is fostered through an illusion of control and a draining of imagination.

Chapter 3

Emergence from the mobile domestic cocoon

In this chapter I discuss my first encounters, activities and impressions of the highway environment outside the car. After addressing some of the effects on visual perception of being in a speeding vehicle I consider some of the implications for the break in perception before looking at other artists who have worked in the highway and roadside environment. A close look at a 16th century still life Vanitas allows me to articulate some of the reasoning behind my process. I will then explain my decision to use the pinhole camera.

In the early days of the automobile 'many motorists described their experience of speed in mystical terms, as though this were an experience not so much opposed to the natural world but one that expressed the inner forces of the universe.' (Urry,1999:3) This novelty has faded, along with its cosmic edge and I suspect that aspects of this naturalisation of speed would be treated as a given today. The automobile embodies speed, progress and efficiency and has a pervasive influence in modern life. Futurism dealt with the observation of rapid movement but what about rapid movement of the observer? Perhaps the trade off for getting somewhere more quickly is the lost ability to observe and a capacity for insight. John Ruskin said ...all travel becomes dull in exact proportion to its rapidity. (Urry, Liniado,1996:6) When the euphoria of speed wears off, and seeps into the high tech car interior to become the numbing travelling norm, certain questions are raised. What happens when the speeding car experience of the highway is abruptly replaced with one of standing and walking in that same environment? What is the nature of the contrast between these two very different experiences of the same highway environment?

Scientific findings suggests ' the size of a driver's visual field depends on driver speed in that the area from which the driver acquires visual information increasingly narrows as speed increases.' (Baker, Bartmann, 1999:40)

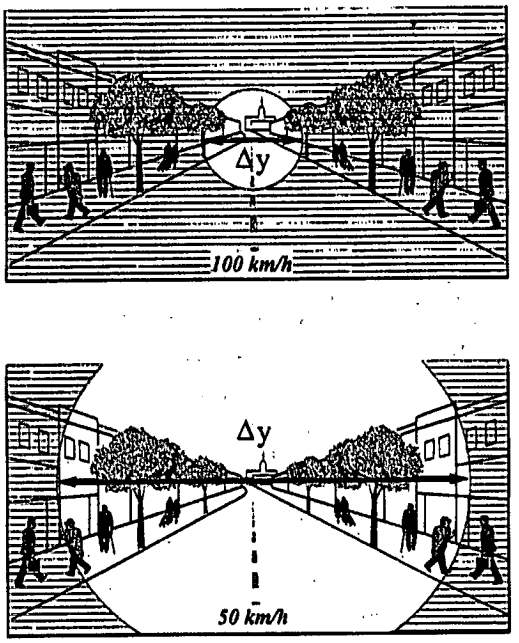

Fig.9 illustrates the narrowing of lateral perception that accompanies increases in velocity (Baker, 1999)

Speed further compounds the isolating properties of the car shell. A strong argument could be made that the rate of speed applied to this automobile environment, as it moves through the larger environment, is inversely proportional to the ability of the car occupants to recognise details in the wider environment. Put another way it is impossible to see detail in objects in close proximity to the road without stopping. We simply cannot visually absorb, in any detail, things we move past in our speeding vehicles. They become a myriad of blurs on our retina as Shaun Gladwell's video piece *Broken Hill linework,* 2006 (Fig.7) so elegantly reveals.

My experiences of car travel on the highway and standing on the side of the road suggest to me a strong case for what I call a perceptual break. The insular moving car creates a cocooned mobile environment within the wider highway environment. I look out from the comfort and relative safety of the enclosed car space whilst rubberised cushions carry my car along sealed surfaces. The technologically enhanced shell increases my isolation from the car's highway surroundings and puts me in a permanent state of transition in relation to them. To stop the car and momentarily opt out of the modern highway travelling experience in 'the middle of nowhere' is to create a collision with the outside world. Stripped of the ability to breeze through the atmosphere I collide with the world beyond the car, with the air and its new found

heaviness. Suddenly I can really see this environment. Completely vulnerable, I walk on the highway roadside as traffic hurtles by. As I wade through the open air, my feet treading the gravel, soil and grass my experience of the surroundings is a visceral one. I hear bones crunch under foot. More noticeable are recent kills slumped and contorted by the wayside, rubbish sometimes strewn on the carcasses or nearby in shocking displays of carelessness. These contrasting parallel environments occupy the same highway space in very different ways. The two co-existing realities could stand as a metaphor for western society's relationship with its environment.

My first response to the roadside environment was to make pencil drawings. The animal remains, decay and general wear and tear that exist within the travel way and its sides fascinate me. Cars and the elements seem to wear away the road's fabric like a predator ever so patiently chasing down its prey, waiting for the first signs of fatigue. Road maintenance, in the end, is a postponement of the inevitable. Traffic flow's abrasive quality along with its distracting and dangerous nature meant that the roadside environment was sometimes not conducive to detailed drawing. Before the use of pinhole photography I would sometimes take animal remains and other roadside objects home to draw. Once in an environment conducive to detailed drawing I was able to scrutinize them to an almost forensic degree. As I drew every broken bone, dishevelled feather and gravel cut each animal's body took on its own topography.

Nikolaus Lang and Marian Drew are two artists who have collected dead animals from Australian roads as subject matter for their artworks. Lang drove through the Flinders ranges collecting the carcasses of freshly killed animals. His artistic technique involved spraying the carcasses with ochre and then hurling them at sheets of paper fixed to a wall. The results from this are imprints of the animals. The act of throwing the animals was a deliberate strategy to avoid imposing any kind of decorative order.

Lang's approach to the image making process is interesting. The action of swinging the dead animals onto the surface is a very physical form of making art. The landscape appears physically in his works through the ochre print of the animal. By this he alludes to the earth and the power of nature to absorb and re-constitute matter.

This manifests through the unique nature of the print, made by animal body, using earth. A suggestion of absorption or transference is given through the prints. The brutal process employed reflects the violence of the animal's death and also contrasts with the subtle result.

In both Lang's work and my own there is acknowledgment of the dead animal by its prominent place in the image. His animals look strangely resurrected in their ethereal forms and their clustered numbers in a single image add to this rising effect. This is in contrast to my own drawing approach where the dead animals are ambiguous with their weight and volume felt through the low view point. In my work I try to give the dead animal an almost fallen, behemoth-like presence. Ironically his very physical approach ends up giving a lightness of effect whilst my careful topographical treatment gives a heavier look to the subject.

Marian Drew uses roadkill to construct still life images. Firstly she photographs a landscape - in the case of *Magpie with Pawpaw* (2006) (Fig.10) it is Bathurst Harbour on Tasmania's remote south-west coast - and suspends it in her studio as a backdrop. She then constructs a still life in the foreground and illuminates this with a torch. This approach gives the image a dramatic painterly quality and evokes the still life paintings of the European masters, particularly the Dutch.

Fig.10 Marian Drew, *Magpie with Pawpaw*, 2006

The image shows a piece of fruit and an empty plate sitting on a tablecloth. They are arranged on ground overlooking a river and nearby a dead magpie lies on a rock. She collected the dead magpie from a road in Tasmania. She is interested in creating images using geographically disparate fauna and landscapes. Her still life pictures are taken in a studio using exposures of up to 10 minutes and she then makes large digital prints on etching paper lending the images an eerie presence.

Although both Drew and myself depict road-kill, which we have extricated from the roadside environment, and we both make references to landscape, her use of collections of domestic items and table surfaces is a major point of difference. Firstly Drew's taking of the dead animals from the road environment stems from the specific need to surround them with the domestic thus removing them from their original context. I generally record the animals where they lie. In this comparison I can conclude that her separation of the dead animal from its original surroundings and its consequent placement in front of a backdrop on a table with various domestic items represents a quest for a symbolic language different to my own. By this juxtaposition with the domestic she sets up discussions which head in different directions to my project but display some correlations in her references to still life.

The Vanitas acts as a reminder of life's transience and the inevitability of death encouraging a somber outlook. As well as being the antithesis to rapid movement this type of still life is important because it connects to my sensibility allowing for contemplation and metaphor.

Popular in Dutch and Spanish still life painting the Vanitas brings objects together in domestic settings . Bryson describes it as 'The cocoon of nearness, that 'dark' space of touch and creatural repetition, harbours a force of gravity and inertia nothing can escape.' (Bryson,1990:61) Marian Drew's still life operates as a vanitas as it draws on sources from well beyond its domestic context to give it allegorical nuance.

An unusual seventeenth century Vanitas by the Spanish painter Antonio De Pedera has special relevance. Three skulls sit on a table with a gold and silver watch. The three skulls and the gold-and-silver watch '... create a trenchant symbol of death... His favourite angle for studying the skull used in many of his paintings where a single skull symbolizes death or the passion of Christ is the view from underneath where the configuration is extremely complex and challenging from the painterly point of view. The middle skull in this composition is seen below.' (Jordan,1985:218)

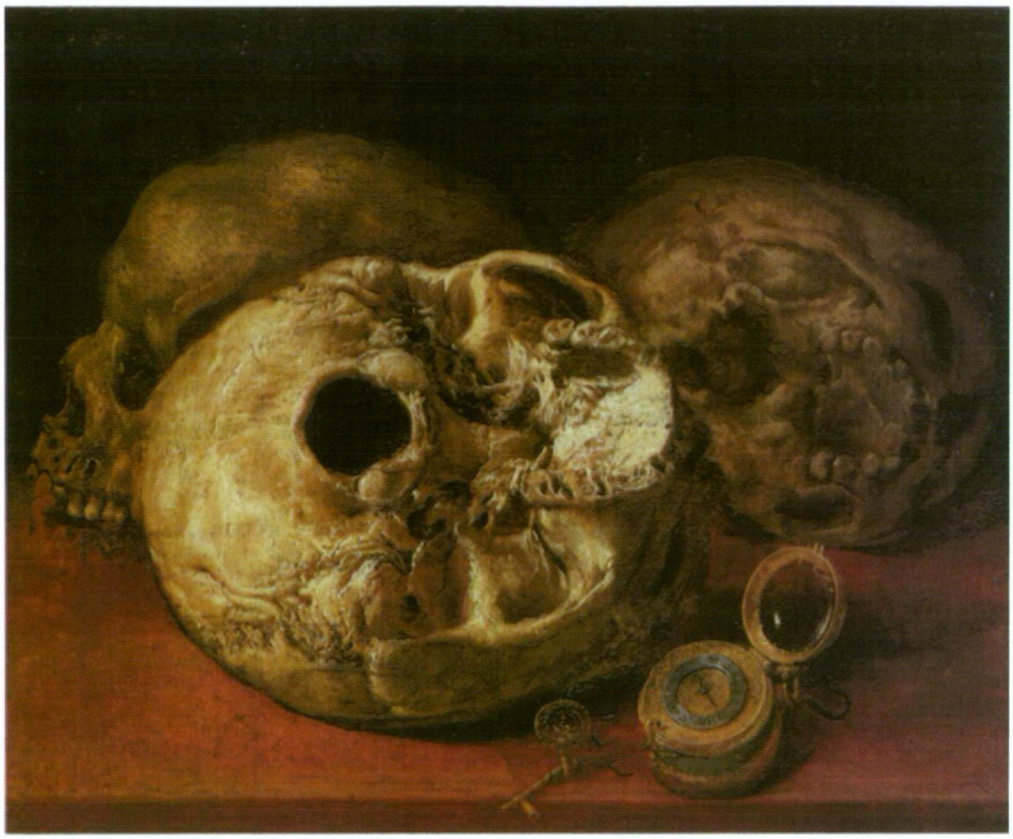

Fig.11 Antonio De Pedera's Vanitas painting, *Three skulls and a silver watch, 1648*

The detailed depiction of a textural organic remnant seen from an unusual angle is something that I deal with in my artwork. The challenge of forensically recording through drawing helps recognize things that I would otherwise miss.

> Unlike artists of an early generation,... who repeated a single image of a given object in several paintings, Pereda returned time and again to the thing itself, painting it from a slightly different angle and rendering afresh its individual features. With uncanny skill he manipulates the creamy impasto until its texture as well as its hue imitates the object under scrutiny. In this way he was able to make this tiny painting, which might so easily have been a dry sermon in lesser hands, a sensuous image whose moral weight is carried by its physical presence. (Jordan,1985:219)

The reflection on death of such a Vanitas has parallels to my own depictions. Both use unusual angles to offer the possibility for different readings of well established artistic subjects. In Pedera's Vanitas the upturned skull with its porous underside revealing networks formerly channeling nerves could refer to the terrain of the mind or the mind body duality. Through my drawings of dead animals I am reflecting on

structures that were alive and animated, a wonderment at how things work not necessarily a morbid pursuit.

As I developed a habit of drawing and photographing animal remains in the road environment I reflected on the collision with a world that I frequently travelled through but only saw at a fleeting glance. To pass into this world is to traverse a rupture in the way I see the road. Suddenly empathy for the animal and the peril it faces seems more real.

Two Australian artists who also appear to empathize with the plight of native animals whose habitats are divided and made more perilous by the road are Trent Parke and Narelle Autio. Their explorations of the subject of roadkill, closely parallels my own in as far as photography and low viewpoints are employed. It seems that there is a natural inclination towards a low view point recording of the subject of roadkill. Perhaps this is an artistic tendency or reaction against the usual driving view of the dead animal on, or beside, the road. This reaction, which engenders an intimacy and empathy for the dead, has an inherently surreal quality because it is so alien to our everyday driving view.

The undeniably surreal qualities of their photographic images are testament to the strangeness of the roadside environment outside of the moving car. I will be looking further at these surreal qualities in the following chapter.

What is most important to me is scrutiny and observation, to look closely at the previously overlooked. The sudden roadside dislocation holds potential for insight and discovery. A finding made by two scientists in 1992 reveals this potential.

> For 33 years the pygmy blue tongue lizard was thought extinct. It was last seen in 1959. But in 1992, in a highly unlikely encounter on the outskirts of Burra, two hours north of Adelaide, two biologists stopped to check out a dead snake on the side of the road. "Ninety nine people out of one hundred would have just gone past a dead snake but we thought 'well we'll stop", said Michael Bull, a Flinders University academic working to protect the lizard. The academics cut open the snake and found the lizard. Since the find, Professor Bull and a recovery team have found more than 5000 of the lizards... (Roberts, 2007:17)

Having shown the origins of the perceptual break I looked at the effects of the speeding vehicle on the visual perception of its occupants. This is the inability to see detail in anything the vehicle passes in close proximity. Artists Nikolaus Lang and Marian Drew have stopped to collect roadkill for their artworks which express different facets of the roadside. Antonio De Pedera's Vanitas reaffirms the importance of drawing to my process as well as showing parallels between that genre and my own roadside outlook. Limitations on drawing on the roadside led to the choice of pinhole photography to record images in this environment. Pinhole's ground level capability make it ideal for my image recording requirements within the roadside environment.

Being in the highway environment after being in the moving car opens up possibilities for new perspectives on highway travel by introducing us to the parallel reality of the roadside - a world often glimpsed but seldom experienced on foot.

Chapter 4

Landscape Illusions, Illusions of Landscape

My experiences of the roadside environment have allowed me time to meditate on its forms and activity. This chapter looks at how these meditations, through their affinity to the movement of surrealism, have led to some different perspectives on the road/highway and its sides. I will gather support for the view that many parts of the roadside are alienating places to experience. It will be shown how surrealism can help delve further into what it means to occupy the roadside for any length of time. Discussing surrealist painters and contemporary painters influenced by the movement will elucidate tactics used in the studio to visually represent the break in perception. My painting process allows a meditation and expression of the roadside shock.

When rupturing the line of transition through the landscape I found myself in the roadside environment seeing cars speed past, looking at the flow of metal and glass that I had previously been a part of. Many of the roadside places I found myself in made me feel vulnerable and precarious in the awareness that I was not meant to be there. As cars have increasingly

> overwhelmed almost all environments, so everyone is coerced to experience such environments through the protective screen. Pedestrians and cyclists have to be kept apart from those car environments. Roads are so full of speed, noise and poisons that only cars (and lorries, buses and so on) can dwell there in relative safety. (Urry,1999:9)

Such large areas of landmass allocated strictly to vehicles, finds no precedent before the 20th century. Many parts of city, urban and rural areas have been turned into'car-only environments – the quintessential non-places of super-modernity.' (Auge, 1995:30) By exerting

> an awesome spatial and temporal dominance over surrounding environments, transforming what can be seen, heard, smelt and even tasted (the spatial and temporal range of which varies for each of the senses). Such car-environments or non-places are neither urban nor rural, local nor cosmopolitan. They are sites of pure mobility within which car-drivers are insulated as they 'dwell-within-the-car. (Urry,1999:11)

These spaces add another dimension to the perceptual break intensifying a profound sense of otherness. Not only was I no longer part of the traffic flow I was in a place that was not meant for the pedestrian. This sense of otherness or being the outsider may find further implications in the cultural milieu where the car is associated with the stereotypically masculine traits of freedom and power. This is epitomized in places

> like North America which contains the iconic car landscapes of the post-war period. Whitelegg emphasises the resulting invisibility of the 'other' to this all-conquering car, of women, children, the elderly, pedestrians, cyclists and so on, indeed anyone who steps outside the car' (Urry,1999:5)

How could I express the alienation and strangeness that characterises the experience of the roadside space? This parallel world that is the roadside environment demands a search for ways to show alternative readings of its form. Whilst standing and being grounded free of the vehicle skin, is liberating to all the senses, representations from this view doesn't interest me. They couldn't reveal the contrast between the states that exist either side of the break. I required a way of drastically changing the outlook. As the pinhole camera requires a steady surface on which to rest (either the ground or a tripod) I could turn this technical limitation to my advantage. By placing the camera on the ground I could attain the eye level of a small creature. At this level, a very difficult level to reach with ones own eyes particularly in this roadside environment, the viewer is plunged into a world where the edge of the road could become the horizon (see Fig.2&3) This view occupies the archetypal other, or nonhuman view for this environment, the absolute contrast I wanted to achieve.

Australian painter, Tim Storrier, uses the compression of near and far landscape elements entailed by a low viewpoint to great effect in his canvases. The categories of landscape and still life collapse amongst arrays of scattered objects found on the cracked earth with featureless desert horizons cutting in close behind the foreground objects. Storrier's visual language includes natural and common objects as well as historical relics.

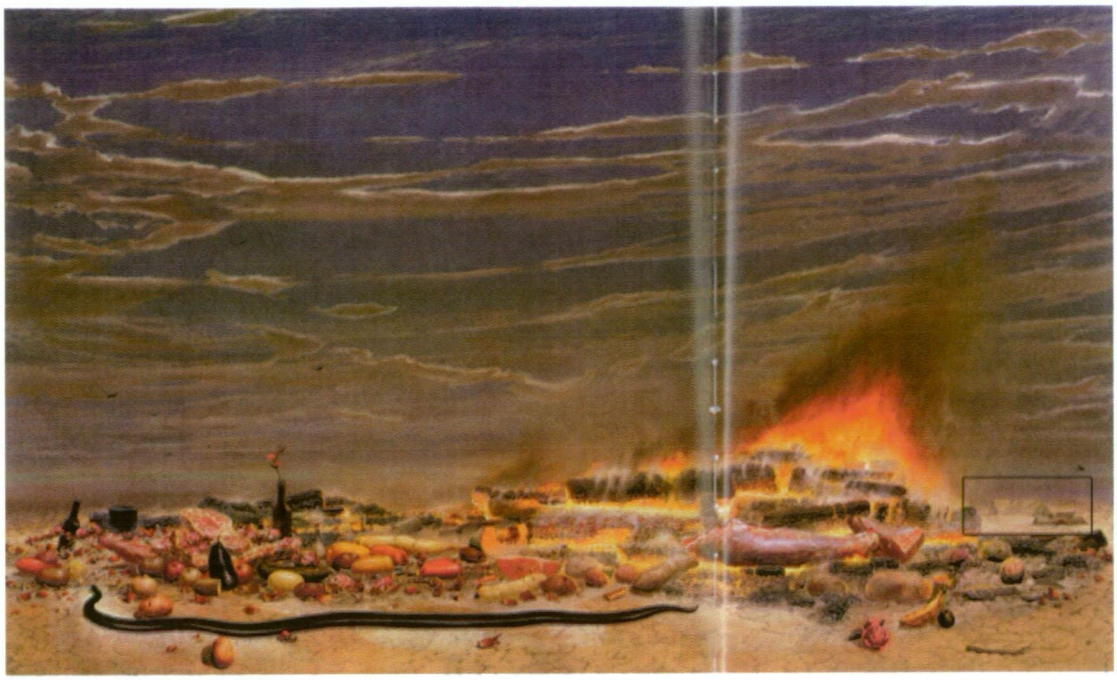

Fig.12 Tim Storrier, *The Fall (incendiary detritus)*, 2001

Fig.13 Tim Storrier, *The Fall (incendiary detritus)*, detail

Of particular interest to me is Storrier's painting The Fall. Painted in 2000 its dense band of objects across the bottom third of the canvas has an intricate interplay of symbols (possibly a Vanitas). The background sky evokes a stage set highlighting the flaming logs in the foreground. The horizon's height suggests a low viewpoint and lends a monumentality to the objects strewn across the foreground desert surface. First literal readings could open up narratives about the aftermath of an outback barbecue but this becomes unsatisfactory when one sees that the meat is uncooked, the fruit and vegetables untouched and most telling of all amongst the maelstrom of charcoal, meat, broken glass and roses serenely sits a wine bottle with a small rose emerging from the opening.

Most interesting to me in this painting are the ambiguous objects to the right, away from the main cluster and occupying a strange kind of middle distance. Are they a bowl and a paper bag? They look like a tent and a boat. With these ambiguous objects in an ambiguous space Storrier has touched on something that I am exploring in my own work namely the uncertain size and situation of objects that occurs when a low viewpoint compresses distance.

His painting makes the presence of decay felt as the meat sits under the outback sun and distant eagles close in for the feast. A notable omission is the absence of flies on the exposed meat sitting in what I assume to be the Aussie outback. Could their very absence contain some obscure meaning? Flies have provided a catalyst for a different way of thinking about roadside existence. The awkwardness, vulnerability and horror I felt were tempered by a meditation on the regenerative powers of nature. This was embodied in the many flies I saw on road-kill. Meditation gave me composure and perspective allowing me to see anew the nature of the road through an analogy of the road as a river. As described in the first chapter this analogy has therapeutic qualities for dealing with the stresses I felt on the roadside.

Could this analogous way of thinking be described as surreal? Surrealism's ability to open whole new worlds within one's own reality and imagination shows malleable and adaptive powers.

> ...Surrealism adapts to any plane, accepts any protrusion, enters any cavity. A whore of the polymorphous, it blends *carte blanche* with *tabula rasa*, mirroring the desires of anyone or anything it meets. Though monstrous, Surrealism is convivial ; though esoteric, it is also populist. Its vectors are set at a cross-cultural, multi lingual, international default. Encoded in its gene structure, or its hard drive, ultra democratic impulses command it to accommodate any environment it is loosed in, or merely located near. (Bruce, 22, 2003)

Surrealism highlights the strange within the mundane. It suggests imaginative leaps and presents the paradoxical in the every day, seeping into many aspects of life like no other art movement before or after. Whilst other movements remain inaccessible the visual language of the surreal holds a special place in the imaginative psyche.

> Cubism and Futurism haven't caused us to wrench our necks, facing simultaneously back and front. Movements such as *De Stijl* and Abstraction don't brighten the patterns of our seeing. *Arte Povera* and *Art Informel* stay dustily impenetrable. And Pop Art? When the twin World Trade Centre burned in New York, sending terror down Broadway, the cry was not how *Roy Lichenstein*, how *Andy Warhol*, it was *how surreal.* (Bruce, 2003:22)

Its ready use as an adjective to describe the indescribable is possible because it 'packages intellect and emotion for us, creating tolerable new forms for that which was intolerable and formless.' (Bruce, 2003:22) With Surrealism the Western eye was offered a whole new imaginative life. New perspectives and new worlds became possible. In this spirit could the view from the non human, the animal in the roadside environment, become in some way more accessible through the perceptual break? Whilst science can inform me on the nature of animal perception, and allow me to take on board certain ideas, my field limits me to imaginative speculation. By looking at the break as a threshold, and marking this as surreal, I have come to see it as, amongst other things, a catalyst for the imagining of animal visual perceptions.

By suggesting that parallel realities exist either side of the break, it could be said that there is close alignment with the surrealist idea of the subconscious realm that lies underneath the skin of reality. On some levels the break in perception could be likened to the shock of diving into cold water. I think of it as tantamount to a surrealist device, simply because it has the capacity to mark a distinct change in thinking and feeling. It suddenly provides me with the possibility of a whole host of perspectives outside the normal realm of experience of the highway. By being on the verge of breaching the interface, that allows navigation and a certain perception of the road and its immediate environment, I sit on the cusp. I am occupying for a moment a place that could symbolically stand for surrealism's need to seek out 'the interface between internal and external realities, illusion and vision, perception and thought.' (Dali, 2000)

The way in which many Surrealist painters and photographers have focused on perceptions of reality (e.g. Dali, Gleeson, Magritte) has significant relevance to my project. These artists played with pictorial conventions relating to depth cues and scale hence referring the viewer to the incredible complexities involved in the process of seeing and perceiving. This relates directly to the project in that it assists in

highlighting the visual illusions that mark the limits of pictorial conventions in so far as they can represent three dimensional objects and environments on a two dimensional surface.

Dali used photography to give his paintings of the irrational and fantastical world more weight. His simulated photographs in paint were a way of making feasible, his idea of the 'concrete irrational'. The subtleties and ambiguities of vision, many of which can be captured by photography, are evident in his painting Slave Market with the Disappearing Bust of Voltaire, 1940. Kenneth Wach describes it as,

> An image based on the bust of Voltaire by the French artist Jean-Antoine Houdon fades and is replaced by a scene of figures and architectural forms that arises out of the same visual elements; even the fruit dish with its two pears, the world of static objects and hard facts, alternately disappears into the fluid contours shared with the background. Dali's paranoiac- critical method was intended to allow us, too to see the world anew, by challenging our clichéd ways of looking... Unpremeditated perceptions were to arise from free association...like Voltaire's bust or a fruit dish, which acted as imaginative triggers for new visual thoughts. (Wach,1996:94)

Fig.14 Salvador Dali, *Slave Market with the Disappearing Bust of Voltaire,* 1940

Dali's double or triple imaging allows the viewer's mind to oscillate between alternative readings using ambiguous objects and pictorial depth cues as a catalyst for new visual thoughts. Unlike many of Dali's illusions in this vein my form of double imaging will remain stable once the viewer has discovered what the painting depicts.

> The perceptual reversal of ambiguous images has been a source of fascination for psychologists and artists alike, albeit for rather different reasons. For some artists the allure in introducing ambiguity is to create in the observer an experience that is, explicitly purely subjective and qualitative. (Lizann Bonnar, 2002:1)

Whilst Dali draws the viewer's attention to the strangeness existing in the everyday then James Gleeson relocates them to a place that exists beneath the "skin" of the everyday world. Gleeson's paintings from the 80's onwards have inspired me. Their references to viscera and decay are shared with some of my paintings of road-kill.

In *Rituals for an anxious spring,* a form sends its protrusions out into the waters of a beach. A phallic object emanates from the top of the form, impaling pieces of dark matter before dividing into a myriad of seething aquatic phantasmagoria pulsing out into the sky before blending into it. A collision between the primal and grotesque has taken place at the edge of an ocean.

Fig.15 James Gleeson, Detail from *Rituals for an anxious spring*, 1987

Gleeson's landscape paintings from this period pose a contrast between the reality that our own conscious mind places us in and something that lies beyond. This is summed up well by Klepac when he describes the enigmatic nature of the works.

> Confronted with Gleeson's late paintings we do not experience that *deja-vu* of recognition of what we know, and we recoil because we do sense nevertheless that they contain a truth that involves us. (Klepac, 2004:13)

His landscapes make the viewer recoil before drawing them in whilst the intention with my works is the opposite. I aim to draw the viewer closer with the promise of landscape detail and then, confront them with what the painting actually depicts. In essence their expectations collide with the subject matter; a kind of simulation of the slippage that takes place when faced with the roadside reality .

A sense of collision can be found in Richard Wastell's paintings of logged coups. The depictions of charred logs lying in landscapes share resemblance with my own work, in highlighting the aftermath of a violent event. Wastell's acute feeling for the surreal is evident in his ability to portray the strange beauty of destruction. His chosen still

life objects (burnt out logs) take on monolithic proportions creating an ambiguity in scale and space.

Wastell has taken the viewer down to ground zero. Intimate ground level views of the burnt out husks lend a monumentality and weight. Twisted charcoal contours evoke intertwined figures and monstrous faces.

Richard Flanagan makes a primal reading of Wastell's logging coup paintings

> This is steely eyed observation of the world as it is. The painstaking technique is evident in each finely rendered charcoal square, every charred lichen circle, in the determination to discover the world as it is, to strip it back to its fundamental truths through rendering of the most basic elements: mud, ash, smoke, charcoal. (Flanagan, 2006:6)

Interestingly Flanagan avoids the easy and well worn adjective of the 'surreal' instead saying that they don't contain a 'reassuring sense of the familiar.' He also goes on to say that it does not 'offer the reassurance landscapes so often have no matter how different the aesthetic.' (Flanagan, 2006:7)

Fig.16 Richard Wastell, The wild beasts, Oil and marble dust on linen, 2006

For me the absence of the reassuring landscape in Wastell's work is an important observation because (subject matter aside) it is a main point of difference between his my work and my own. There are a number of similarities that could be drawn between Richard Wastell's burnt out forest coup paintings and my road-kill works. They both depict the aftermath of destruction of the natural world brought about by humans. Both strive to show the strange beauty that exists when parts of the natural world are thrown into disarray by human actions. In pursuit of this strange beauty there is the shared technique of the low viewpoint as well as the ambiguity of shape and the evocative power of form. In this last similarity lies the pivotal difference in treatment. Where Wastell uses this ambiguity to immediately impart the strangeness of the aftermath of logging operations. I am often seeking to lull the viewer into a false sense of security, via a double imaging that camouflages the disturbing with the familiar. This is done, by disguising the destruction created by the road with the reassuring landscape.

Thus I am brought back to the topic of landscape and illusion, two main aspects of the picturesque. As discussed in Chapter 1 an answer to the visual representation of the perceptual break lies in a merging of the picturesque mirage of natural order seen from inside the car with what is found on the roadside. When these are combined in certain ways a dynamic viewing experience can be set up via the viewers approach to the work. An appearance of landscape is given and as the viewer moves in to inspect the detail their expectations collide with the subject matter of the dead animal on the roadside.

The main problem is contextualizing the image within the roadside environment without a heavy reliance on obvious road signifiers. Nevertheless I think it is an avenue worth exploring because it has potential for replacing complacency with curiosity about the whole idea of landscape and its firm entrenchment in western vision and culture. The aim is to promote inquiry into what lies beneath the surface of landscape.

It has been confirmed that parts of the road and roadside, called 'car only environments' have been made alienating places, with no concession made for the presence of the pedestrian. During my pinhole documentation I have developed a kind of calm alertness for being in the roadside environment using a meditation that uses a road/river analogy. This mechanism owes a debt to the twentieth century movement of Surrealism with its capacity to mould and adapt to different environments as well as its ability to connect seemingly unconnected elements in novel and interesting ways. The surreal also assists in a solution to the problem of visual representation of the break in perception. Paintings by the Surrealists Dali and Gleeson have influenced me, as have works by Tim Storier and Richard Wastell. Dali's double and triple image illusions provide possibilities for the mental collision of the viewer whilst Gleeson's mindscapes from the 1980s inspire me with their strange visceral nature and monumentality. Storier's paintings of desert still-life provide excellent examples of how effective and evocative a low viewpoint can be. Wastell is a contemporary whose series of oils featuring logged coups shows powerful echoes of the surreal.

Conclusion

The body of paintings that constitutes this investigation scrutinizes the conventions of landscape paintings and questions the way I inhabit the natural environment. These works reveal how technology mediates my relationship with the natural environment in a way that is desensitizing.

The challenge of representing the perceptual break that occurs when I experience the roadside environment after driving along the highway, has generated a body of work that integrates the genre of picturesque landscape with the insular nature of the interior of the modern speeding car. I have used pinhole photography and painting to seek out examples of illusions of landscape on the roadside bringing together its surreal nature with echoes of the car view. In these juxtapositions the landscape picturesque is subverted. Highlighting the resemblances between roadside detritus and Mitchell's concept of landscape as medium, holds a certain irony that I have come to savour.

Given the subjective nature of perception and illusion, questions remain about viewers' responses to the paintings. How well will the illusions work and how far do they go towards achieving my specific end of representing the perceptual break? Attempts at concealing clues of the roadside environment and preserving the illusion until the viewer is within relatively close viewing range, remain problematic.

My exploration of the roadside has led to the realisation that it is an ideal place for testing the boundaries of my perception as well as extending the capacity of my artistic process. The roads' edges have become an abundant source of metaphor, allowing the overlap of a particular location and picturesque landscape themes with suggestions of Vanitas still life painting and Surrealist painting. Both of these genres have contributed to an expression of those particular qualities of the roadside that make it a unique place for me. Questions of location emerge; could my representation of the roadside perceptual break be employed in other parts of Australia? Could it be used to reflect roadsides and landscapes in other countries? Having convinced myself that I experience a perceptual break in the roadside environment, I speculate on what other places and situations within modern existence might allow similar awareness of

the degree to which culture and technology separate and mediate my relationship with the natural environment.

A further implication of the project is the future direction of my work. It has made me acutely aware of how strong an influence landscape conventions have on my visual experiences of land and the natural world. In this respect the conclusion of the project also marks the start of further explorations.

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Appendix

Bitumen networks and river paths

Images of Assessment Exhibition

Academy Gallery, Launceston

April 2009

The Sea Eagle, 2007 Oil on canvas, 80 x 120cm

The Crumbling Arrow, 2008, Oil on canvas, 80x 120cm

Raven 1, 2005, Oil on canvas, 40 x 60cm

Devil Falls, 2008, Oil on canvas, 151 x 165cm

Marawah Devil, 2007 Oil on canvas, 80 x 120cm

Roadside Ditch after Dombrovskis, 2009 Acrylic on canvas, 80 x 100cm

(Trichosurus vulpecula fuliginosus) *Gold morph remains after Glover*, 2009, acrylic on canvas, 80 x 120cm

Storm possum, 2005, Oil on canvas, 40 x 60cm

The Flock, 2006 Oil on canvas, 48 x 84cm